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The Leader Who Serves (Minneapolis, MN)

C. William Pollard

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THE LEADER WHO SERVES

LEADERSHIP NETWORK

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

JUNE 27, 1994

C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN
THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

Thank you for the opportunity of sharing with you some thoughts about leadership as you consider the important subject of the church in the 21st century. I would like to begin our time together reading from John 13.

Does this describe the leader of today? Is the subject of servant leadership relevant for today or, for that matter, for the 21st century? There is no scarcity of feet to wash. Towels are always available. John 13 describes an eternal faith that is relevant for today and tomorrow. The only limitation involves the ability of each of us to be on our hands and knees, to compromise our pride, to be involved and to have compassion for those we serve.

A friend of mine recently had an interesting experience with one of those telephone answering machines. [Here tell the story of "Who are you and what do you want?"]

Who are we and what do we want? I would hope that we would all agree that as followers of Jesus Christ we are seeking to be more effective in our witness and ministry in a world that desperately needs our involvement and leadership. It is for that reason that we have come here to learn from each other.

It is a world of accelerated change and choice. The changes in the politics and economies of what was the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and what is emerging in China have affected the lives of millions of people.

Yes, there is more freedom in the world today and certainly more choice and definitely more confusion. The restraints that suppressed the age-old conflicts of some people groups are no longer there. Both religious and cultural hatreds have come to the surface.

The infrastructures we have developed in the West to help guide the freedom of choice cannot be easily duplicated in societies that have grown up under central planning and control. Nor can these societies assimilate the inevitable excesses of freedom that we have allowed in the West, whether they be sexual liberties, drugs, violence, failures or poverty.

During the past 12 months I have had to make several trips to Europe on business, including Eastern Europe and Russia. There are many exciting things happening in the church and, with them, the opportunity to proclaim the good news of salvation. But many of the societies also appear to be coming apart at the seams--unable to keep up with the downside of freedom. Russia today is as close to anarchy as I want to come. It is a society that seems void of responsibility or any standard of right or wrong--*student response--truth and disclosure more common than lies--text book--Eastern Europe--lost in*

The mood of our land is pessimistic, in some cases depressingly so. Not many Americans are excited about the opportunity of tomorrow. In addition to the issues of uncertainty in employment, we don't seem to trust those who represent us in government. We know that we are going to have to pay higher taxes, but we are not sure about the benefit. We want universal access to health care, but nobody knows the costs or how we are going to finance this right. The enormity of the deficit means one thing for certain: the dollar bill in my hand today will be worth less, not more, in the future. Laws and regulations continue to multiply in complexity, and we are bombarded on every side by news of variant human behavior patterns--some of which we are encouraged to accept, although we have been taught since our youth that they are wrong--and others, by the sheer volume of publicity given them, seem to be more prevalent today than they were in the past. We view the tragedy of O. J. Simpson and his family on live television like it was a Monday night movie. We live in a society where people search for moral pluralism, and question whether there are any absolutes or any guidelines, and they fall into despair and depression as their lives go out of control.

Some discuss our period of time not only in terms of the Post-Christian Era, but in terms of Post Modernism and Deconstructionism where everything is relative, even the meaning of words. The Post Modern advocates, say, for example, that the university should no longer be a place for the pursuit of knowledge. In Post Modern thought it becomes a place to pursue pleasure and desire. It should be more erotic than cerebral.

Hunter, the sociologist from the University of Virginia, in his recent book on conflicts in our society calls it a time of cultural wars, where the most fundamental ideas about who we are and how to order our lives individually and together are now at odds. His conclusion is that the nub of the disagreement can be traced to a matter of ultimate moral authority. How are we to determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable? The division or gap in our society, he concludes, is growing. People, living and working in the same community are, in fact, worlds apart. Arthur Schlesinger describes it as a time of the disuniting of America, where group rights have overtaken individual liberties and the principle of *e pluribus unum* is fading fast.

But however you view or label this rapidity of change and choice and lack of predictability in the events that swirl around us, I would like to suggest that in this crucible of uncertainty there is great opportunity for positive direction, provided those of us who have been trained to think, lead--and lead with conviction of purpose--lead as disciples and examples of Jesus Christ and lead as servants of those we lead.

Will the leader please stand? Not the full-time Christian worker, but the full-time servant. Not the theologian, but the lover of people. Not the preacher, but the listener. Not the teacher, but the learner. Not the administrator, but the initiator. Not the successful businessman, but the steward. Not the taker, but the giver.

Now as I ask these fundamental questions about leadership and the future, I do so not as a philosopher, educator, or minister of the gospel, but simply as a businessman--a Christian businessman who is seeking to lead the fast-growing, dynamic service company that we call ServiceMaster--masters of service, serving the Master. Our revenues today are in excess of \$4 billion. We provide management services in over 1300 health care institutions, 500 hundred colleges and public schools, and 100 major industrial facilities. We are also providing a variety of specialty services to over 4.5 million homeowners.

We are a company that has experienced rapid growth, doubling in size every three and a half years for the past twenty years. We are a public company, and our shares are listed and traded on the New York Stock Exchange. For the last 11 years, my performance day by day could be measured by whether the price of our stock went up or down. Yes, I live in one of those pressure cooker environments, where earnings and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and

where earnings and profits have always been up every quarter for the past twenty-three years. The shareholders to whom I am responsible as a leader vote every day on my leadership. They have the choice to buy, hold, or sell their share of ownership.

There is much about our business that may be classified as routine or mundane. We are often dealing with people in entry-level positions--unskilled and many times uneducated and, more often than not, unnoticed. We do such things as clean toilets and floors, maintain boilers and air handling units, kill bugs, provide maid service, and maintain and repair home appliances. The task before us is to train, motivate and develop people so that they will do a more effective job, be more productive in their work and, yes, even be better people. This is both a management and a leadership challenge. For us in ServiceMaster, it is more than a job or means to earn a living. It is, in fact, a mission--a way of life. Our company objectives are simply stated: *To Honor God In All We Do--To Help People Develop--To Pursue Excellence*, and--*To Grow Profitably*. These first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. As we seek to implement these objectives in the operations of our business, they provide for us a reference point for what we do and how we determine that which is right and seek to avoid that which is wrong. They, in effect, define our mission.

They do not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes, but because of a stated standard and reason for the standard, we can't hide our mistakes. They are fleshed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness, nor is it a standard that should be used as a reason for our financial success. Do not try to apply it like some mathematical formula. It does, however, provide a foundation and a reference point for action. It is a living set of principles that allows one to confront the difficulties and failures that are all part of life and with reassurance that the starting point never changes and provides a reason and hope above it all. The ultimate test is measured in the changed lives of people. We are not a Christian company, yet we include a Bible verse in our annual report and many of us will pray before business meetings and as part of important decisions. We have an open commitment to sharing and living our faith. We are involved in issues of work and family. Although many of our officers are Christians, we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish and of no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized for mixing God and profit, but seldom for our performance. These objectives force those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live our faith--to integrate our faith with our work. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead--to lead by example and service.

But how does this relate to the church of the 21st century? I firmly believe that God is providing opportunities to live and implement our faith in direct correlation to the growing confusion, violence and chaos in the world we live in. How must the church change to prepare its members to be effective in this vacuum of hope and to reach out and serve a needy and hostile world?

Will the role of the church be limited to becoming an enclave for people to withdraw, protect and hold onto their faith with others of like mind, or will it also seize the opportunity to be an instrument of change, reaching out to the lost and the needy and developing and preparing its members to act and lead based upon the knowledge, motivation, and encouragement they have received within the church.

To do the latter it must (1) draw fewer lines of exclusion--reach out to involve and relate beyond the comfortable limits of an inner ring of like minds, (2) increasingly become a vehicle of teaching and learning, (3) encourage among its membership compassion and caring for others, (4) provide opportunity for growing participation and interaction in community worship and (5) accept that lessons of good organization and management may apply to the church--that is, an organized division of labor, skills and talents inherent in any organization of people--and recognize and resolve issues of authority and governance, leadership and ministry.

As evangelicals, we often keep defining and redefining our faith with lines that split, divide, and exclude. I think the message of Jesus Christ is clear. "I am the way, the truth and the light. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. For God so loved the

world [not just evangelicals] that whosoever [no race or gender qualification here] believes on Me shall be saved.

As evangelicals we have developed our own subculture with our own language and customs. We try to label each other and determine who fits and who should be excluded. We keep seeking to redefine God's Word by our own statements of faith. We want answers when God has reminded us that we need to live with some ambiguity as part of the testing and trying of our faith.

[Story of African Hospital--evangelical and protestant.]

Despite all the teaching of scripture about church unity, we practice division and highlight difference. It is not something new, but more of a pattern of the way things have been for centuries. When Christians come together, they divide. God in His infinite wisdom, understanding and grace has somehow used this very human characteristic of Christians to accomplish His purpose, and so it may always be, including in the church of the 21st century. But His word--the Bible--our rule of faith and practice--suggests a better way, a way of unity and cooperation among the saints. To have a positive influence in an otherwise pagan society, we must join hands. The issues of abortion; sexual orientation; euthanasia; the dysfunctional family; racism; and the role of religion and faith in education, healthcare, business and government demand cooperation and action among all the followers of Jesus Christ. It is our role to serve together.

There are a lot of crazy things going on in this world around us, and there is reason for us to seek to withdraw--send our children to Christian schools or home school--limit most of our social

activities and friendships to our local church and take comfort in the message from the pulpit that provides us with a rule book of do's and don'ts to separate us from the world. But the world needs our involvement, not our withdrawal. Our salt and light are desperately needed. There is much of what we hear from the Christian media that would encourage us to circle the wagons in defense of the faith, but I am suggesting the opposite for the church of the 21st century--an offense of involvement. I am suggesting that Christians identify what they have in common, not how they are different, and unite in more common efforts.

The result came from a life of involvement proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ--the example of his life, the example of many other evangelical leaders the past forty years--exemplified in many ways by Carl Henry. Call of the human conscience has been for involvement.

The church of the 21st century must increasingly become an educational institution. Not only in matters of faith, but also in the teaching and learning about how we are to live our faith, relating to others, raising a family, reconciling our differences, loving our spouse. The breakdown and fractionalization of the family unit is resulting in a growing gap in the learning process that used to occur in the home. These issues plus the fractured relationship of the family have become so acute that they are affecting the work environment and some businesses, including ServiceMaster, are contemplating establishing special departments to provide counsel and support for employees.

The church of the 21st century must also keep up with changing methods of teaching and learning. For example, how do the present day formats of your order of service or meetings reflect that: (1) people learn more by teaching than by listening, and that (2) people often learn

more from their peers than their superiors? How does this fit with the normal hierarchy of the teaching and learning process? People need to be entertained as part of the communication in the learning process. [Insert influence of TV.] People need opportunity to participate and a dialog. The monologue is less effective. People learn and comprehend as individuals, not as a group.

It is also imperative that the church, in a growing environment of pluralism and diversity, teach with understanding the essentials of the faith--the essentials that one must live for and die for. There are some lines that must be drawn even though they may be few and far between. In the reality of our growing pagan society we must have a better understanding of immutables--the issues one would die for. A message of involvement and compassion may result in nothing more than a statement of good intentions--a wish list for the social do-gooder--unless we are leaders with a conviction of the essentials of our faith and a compassion to carry those essentials to a world of need.

We need encouragement to have more compassion and care for the sinners that God loves. Christ as a servant leader was a leader with compassion--compassion for the lost, for the poor and needy, for the leper, for the Gentile, for the Roman Centurion. His witness was by walk, not just talk. [My stories about the Aids victim.]

The role of worship is central to the function of the church. It will be central in the 21st century. But we must be prepared for the possibility of more interaction, more participation from the worshipers and also be prepared for the reality that the brick and mortar of the church will be far less important in the future as the church increases its use of technology to communicate with multiple locations at the same time.

There will be the need for more effective leadership and management of the church of the 21st century. The skills of being a good preacher are not necessarily the skills of being a good leader. Leadership is both an art and a science. Membership on the Board of Elders is not just a position of prestige. As we know, it is a role of service and spiritual discernment. These requirements are in much demand and will be in the future. How will the leadership and management of the church in the 21st century relate to and be involved in the function, ministry and accountability of parachurch organizations. (This could be the subject of an entire conference.) It cannot be ignored to be as effective as we need to be in the 21st century.

The world, not just our Christian friends, not just the denomination of our roots, not just that illusive constituency that provides our support, needs Christ-centered leadership. This is a time for each of us to review and refine our "belief," focusing on the essentials, disregarding the non-essentials. The world needs committed Christian leaders who know what they believe and what they would die for, who are committed to apply and live their belief where they are planted, who recognize and support the sanctity of life and the dignity and worth of every individual created in God's image and who maintain a quest of inquiry, knowing that all truth is God's truth and that learning is a lifelong experience and who are prepared as part of that leadership to serve--to serve on their hands and knees, ready to do the unimportant without rank or title--even the title of Reverend, President or Senior Pastor.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus cared enough to leave his position with the Father, to be involved in becoming a man, and to have compassion for the needy and the lost and to take on the form of a servant, so that His followers could do likewise--with the conviction and faith that would sustain them.

We must reach out to include more, tolerate more, and serve more.

* * *

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